The 12 Relationship Principles (Part II)

By Andrew Sobel

Last month I described the first five of 12 Relationship Principles that you should use to guide your relationship-building efforts. This month, I set out the remaining seven.

I’ve had such a strong positive response just to the first five that I’ve decided to offer a mini-course built around the 12 principles. In this course I’ve deepened the explanation of each principle, and set out action steps to implement it. This free program will be available later this month on my new website as a limited series of 12 weekly emails. Look out for it.

Also, to whet your appetite for my new book, I went into the studio and produced a short video about Power Questions that you can watch (click the link to view). I guarantee this video will inform you, make you smile—and possibly even make you laugh. The book will be available around February 1.

Finally—next month, to inaugurate the release of Power Questions, you’ll receive three newsletters dedicated to the art and science of asking great questions.

The First Five Relationship Principles

From last month’s article:

1. **PRINCIPLE ONE**: Build your network before you need it.

2. **PRINCIPLE TWO**: Be generous with your time and wisdom, and help others with no expectation of receiving anything in return

3. **PRINCIPLE THREE**: Start a relationship by having an interesting conversation together, not by showing how brilliant you are.

4. **PRINCIPLE FOUR**: Focus on the person on following him or her throughout an entire career, not the position.
5. **PRINCIPLE FIVE:** Cultivate your own interests so that you are interesting to others.

**The Remaining Seven Relationship Principles**

**PRINCIPLE SEVEN:** **Become truly distinctive at something that’s of value to others.** In our personal lives, we are drawn to others based on common interests, chemistry, likeability, and other intangible qualities. These factors are also very important in professional relationships, but there is more: In business we look for people who can help us solve our problems and achieve our goals. In other words, you don’t build a professional network based solely on being a nice and interesting person; you have to have something to offer. The foundation of your relationship building efforts has to be a truly distinctive expertise or value that you provide.

**PRINCIPLE EIGHT:** **Be enthusiastic and passionate about your work...and everything else you do.**

Enthusiasm is contagious! Think about the most enjoyable and memorable professors you had in college. More likely than not, they possessed unbridled enthusiasm for their subject. Whether it was Art 101 or Political Science, they drew you in. They captivated your attention and interest. Whether you’re dealing with a client or your boss, or you’re in a job interview, it’s essential to have enthusiasm. It draws people to you. It wins them over to your cause.

**PRINCIPLE NINE:** **Be authentic--If you’re introverted, be comfortable about it; if you’re extroverted, be that way all the time!** A best-selling book about networking, published a few years ago, spells out a frenetic formula for relationship building. The author talks about making 50 or even 75 phone calls a day, holding monthly “salons” at his home where lavish dinners are served, and relentlessly doing favors for dozens of people who may one day repay the good deed. I believe a few, rare professionals can do exactly what he describes. But most cannot.

When people first meet you, one of the most important things they are looking for is authenticity; that is, is what they see what they are really going to get? Don’t try to slavishly imitate someone else’s style. You have to develop your own, based on who you are and your natural character. Whoever and whatever you are--funny, introverted, cautious, reflective, and so on--be that way all the time.

**PRINCIPLE TEN:** **Give some trust to start the trust building process.** Trust is the glue that holds together every long-term client relationship. It’s a client’s belief that you will act in her best interests and personally uphold the highest standards of integrity and competency, both inside and outside the office. When a client trusts you, anything is possible; your recommendations carry more weight, and when you propose an additional sale, your client sees sincerity not salesmanship.

To start the trust-building process, you often have to extend some trust to the other person. You need to assume positive intentions in their actions.
If you walk into a client’s office and you harbor the attitude that “most clients don’t care about a long-term relationship and are just trying to get the best price,” you may find that you precipitate a vicious circle of untrusting behavior.

**PRINCIPLE ELEVEN:** **Demonstrate integrity at all times.** Integrity is a state of wholeness in which you act in accordance with a set of coherent values or principles. In other words, you know what’s right, you’re clear about what you believe in, and you consistently follow your beliefs. Based on interviews I’ve conducted with hundreds of top executives, it’s clear to me that there are four key dimensions to integrity:

1. Honesty
2. Discretion
3. Reliability
4. Consistency

Are you always honest, discreet, reliable, and consistent in your behavior?

**PRINCIPLE TWELVE:** **Be seen as contributing directly to your clients’ growth and profits, and they will never get enough of you. Be viewed as a cost and you can be cut at any time.** You can exercise great relationship building skills as an individual advisor. But if you’re not viewed as contributing to the accomplishment of important goals—revenue and profit growth, innovation, and so on—you’d be forever seen as an expendable vendor.

Do your clients view you as supporting their most important goals? Are you part of their growth and profits? Can you tie your work directly to these things, and show the value of what you’re doing? Or are you a kind of necessary evil, an expense that they have to begrudgingly incur—sort of like when you buy gasoline for your car?

**Summary: The 12 Principles**

1. Build your network before you need it
2. Become truly distinctive at something that’s of value to others
3. Be enthusiastic and passionate about your work...and everything else you do.
4. Be generous with your time and wisdom, and help others with no expectation of receiving anything in return
5. Build great relationships by having great conversations, not by trying to show the other person how brilliant you are
6. Focus on the person—on following him or her throughout an entire career—not the position
7. Be authentic. If you’re introverted, be comfortable about it; if you’re extroverted, be that way all the time!
8. Cultivate your own interests so that you are interesting to others.
9. Be genuinely interested in others
10. Give some trust to start the trust building process
11. Demonstrate integrity at all times
12. Be seen as contributing directly to your clients’ growth and profits, and they will never get enough of you. Be viewed as a cost and you can be cut at any time.

Andrew Sobel is the leading authority on client relationships and the skills and strategies required to earn enduring client loyalty. The most widely published author in the world on business relationships, he is a consultant, educator, and coach to major services firms worldwide. Andrew is the author of the recently released *All for One: 10 Strategies for Building Trusted Client Partnerships* which was voted one of the top 10 professional services sales and marketing books of the decade as well as the business bestsellers *Clients for Life* and *Making Rain*. He has contributed chapters to four books on leadership, marketing, and human resources management; and his articles and work have appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *US Today*, *Strategy+Business*, and the *Harvard Business Review*. He was a Senior Vice President and Country Managing Director for Gemini Consulting, where he served on the European Executive Committee, and for the last 15 years he has led his own consulting firm, Andrew Sobel Advisors, Inc. He can be reached at [www.andrewsobel.com](http://www.andrewsobel.com) (Tel: 505.982.0211).